

Message Text

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SUBJ: IRISH PRIME MINISTER RESIGNS PARTY LEADERSHIP

1. IRISH PRIME MINISTER (TAOISEACH) LIAM COSGRAVE ANNOUNCED TO HIS SURPRISED COLLEAGUES JUNE 24 THAT HE WAS RESIGNING HIS POSITION AS HEAD OF THE FINE GAEIL PARTY. THIS DECISION CAME IN THE WAKE OF THE PARTY'S MASSIVE DEFEAT IN THE JUNE 16 ELECTION. COSGRAVE IS STILL TAOISEACH UNTIL JULY 5, WHEN JACK LYNCH WILL TAKE OVER. COSGRAVE SAID THAT HE WILL REMAIN IN THE PARLIAMENT(DAIL) AS A "BACK BENCHER", BUT IT APPEARS THAT HIS ERA AS A STRONG MAN IN IRISH AFFAIRS IS OVER.

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2. A NEW PARTY LEADER WILL BE CHOSEN BY THE PARLIAMENTARY PARTY GROUP AT A MEETING SCHEDULED FOR JULY 1. FOREIGN MINISTER GARRET FITZGERALD IS THE OVERWHELMINGLY POPULAR FAVORITE BUT IT IS BY NO MEANS CERTAIN THAT HE WILL SUCCEED COSGRAVE. MANY OF THE OLDER PARTY LEADERS CONSIDER FITZGERALD TOO LIBERAL. OTHER CANDIDATES ARE TRANSPORT AND POWER MINISTER TOM FITZPATRICK, FINANCE MINISTER RICHIE RYAN, EDUCATION MINISTER

PETER BARRY AND AGRICULTURE MINISTER MARK CLINTON. ATTORNEY GENERAL JOHN KELLY HAS AN OUTSIDE CHANCE. JUSTICE MINISTER PATRICK COONEY WOULD HAVE BEEN HIGH ON THE LIST BUT HE WAS NOT REELECTED TO THE DAIL.

3. FIFTY-SEVEN-YEAR-OLD COSGRAVE, SON OF THE FIRST HEAD OF STATE OF AN INDEPENDENT IRELAND, HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF THE DAIL SINCE 1943. HE HAS BEEN A FRONT-BENCHER/MINISTER SINCE 1954, PARTY LEADER SINCE 1965, AND PRIME MINISTER SINCE 1973.

4. COMMENT: COSGRAVE'S LACKLUSTER PERSONALITY IS NOT BEING CITED AS ONE REASON FOR THE COALITION'S LOSS LAST WEEK, THOUGH IN RETROSPECT IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE COALITION WOULD HAVE LOST ANYWAY BECAUSE OF THE POCKETBOOK ISSUE NO MATTER WHO WAS LEADER. THE RESIGNATION DECISION WAS TYPICAL OF THE MAN. HE HAS A REPUTATION FOR CONFIDING IN NO ONE EXCEPT HIS WIFE. IT IS HARD TO ACHIEVE PERSPECTIVE ON COSGRAVE'S LEADERSHIP SO SOON AFTER THE DEFEAT. HE PRESIDED OVER A COTERIE OF TALENTED BUT MIS-YOKED MINISTERS, WHO WERE MORE OR LESS GIVEN A FREE HAND. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE LAST FOUR YEARS WAS A MIXTURE OF MILD LIBERALISM--MUCH SOCIAL LEGISLATION WAS PUT THROUGH-- AND STAUNCH CONSERVATISM IN SUCH AREAS AS LAW-AND-ORDER AND CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS. THE PICTURE OF THE PRIME MINISTER VOTING AGAINST HIS OWN GOVERNMENT'S BILL ON LEGALIZING CONTRACEPTION HAS NOW GONE INTO IRISH VIGNETTE HISTORY. COSGRAVE'S PERSONALITY HAS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BEEN MUCH MISUNDERSTOOD. IN PUBLIC HE AS SEVERAL STEPS ABOVE CALVIN COOLIDGE IN TACITURNITY AND UNSMILING STONY VISAGE. IN PRIVATE HE WAS A MAN OF SOME CHARM AND HAD A FINE SENSE OF HUMOR. HE WAS A STRONG BUT PASSIVE LEADER RESERVING JUDGMENT AND DECISIONS BUT ALWAYS STEPPING IN DECISIVELY WHEN THE CRUNCH CAME. HE HAD LITTLE INTEREST IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS, LEAVING THAT UP TO GARRET FITZGERALD, AND MADE LITTLE IMPACT UPON THE EUROPEAN SCENE. ONE OF HIS FINEST MOMENTS AS TAOISEACH CAME WHEN HE MADE AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO THE US IN 1976, MET WITH PRESIDENT FORD AND ADDRESSED A JOINT SESSION OF CONGRESS. HE NOW IS APPARENTLY AT THE END OF HIS CAREER, AND LATER ANALYSTS WILL FIGURE OUT HIS PLACE IN IRISH HISTORY. BUT AT LEAST IT CAN BE SAID THAT HE HAS BEEN ONE OF THE TWO OR THREE MOST IMPORTANT IRISH LEADERS IN THE LAST DECADE AND OVERALL HE PROVIDED GOOD GOVERNMENT IN A PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT TIME. RENDAHL

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